2: Flannery E-5 (1940-1948) 1953
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CHAPTER VIII

CHILDHOOD

858 In the days before the buffalo disappeared and before formal schooling was available, childhood, it was said, for girls was shorter and for boys was longer than at present. A girl was ordinarily [582] given in marriage before she was twelve years old—certainly before she attained physiological maturity. A boy on the other hand, though seemingly anxious to participate in hunting and in war as soon as he was able, was not forced to bear the full responsibilities of adulthood until the end of adolescence. While there was considerable variation from family to family in the amount of time required of children in training for practical tasks, all enjoyed a considerable amount of "free time."

PLAY

857 Singer and Coming Daylight, the two oldest of our informants,
526 in recalling the amusements and pastimes of their youth, decided that sliding down hills was one of the most pleasurable as it could [493] be done at any time of the year. In winter, when there was snow, the boys used a kind of sled made by lashing buffalo rib-bones together. Girls managed just as well by simply sitting on their robes and holding between their legs the end which usually hung free. In summer a stiff buffalo hide was used for sliding down the grassy slopes.[1] When the water was frozen, boys and girls alike [524] skated with their feet on the ice, thus clearing a slick surface on which to spin their tops made of horn.

857 Swimming, however, was the great sport in summer. Girls left
526 their dresses close to the bank, those of the older girls in a neat row closest to the edge and those of the smaller girls in the next
481 row. Beginners used the dog-paddle, but the boys developed profi-

[1] For this and some other types of amusement, see Kroeber, 1908, pp. 190–91.

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ciency with the overhand stroke and girls with the breast stroke.[2] Sometimes the children amused themselves by rolling down the bank so that their bodies made a loud smack as they hit the water. At other times they held contests to see who could dive and stay under the longest time, or who could make the biggest bubble by exhaling under water. Follow-the-leader was played even in big rivers like the Missouri, but only the more courageous participated in this game. The one who had the reputation as bravest was the leader, and Coming Daylight claimed that she, herself, often led off, one of her accomplishments being the ability to swim quite far under water.

There was no adult supervision of children at play and they spent much time at the water's edge, even when not intending to swim. Modelling in clay was done by boys as well as by girls. The latter liked especially to form wet clay into "parflesches" and incise marks to represent beaded and painted designs.

Walking on stilts, teetering on logs, swinging by standing in a loop of rawhide, all were considered enjoyable activities for little girls. Nevertheless some of their games were quite rough and-tumble. In one such game, girls formed a circle, each pinching the flesh on the back of her neighbor's left hand; while standing thus they sang a song which was repeated as many times as necessary until someone let go of her neighbor's hand; whereupon this girl was jumped on and mauled by all the others. In another game, one girl, with her eyes closed, would try to find the others who were seated in a row on the ground. Different ones would call out: "This way! This way!" Each was anxious to be the first discovered. As soon as the girl who was "it" touched one of the others, she picked her up and, carrying her upside-down on her back to the spot from which she had originally started, she dumped her burden on the ground. This procedure was repeated until "it" had carried each girl, but the last one to be dumped was tickled unmercifully by all the others.

Girls played with two kinds of balls. One type was of buck-skin stuffed with deer-hair. This they would toss to one another. The other type of ball was large and made from the bladder of a buffalo cow, dried and stuffed.

[2] The marked ability of the Gros Ventres in swimming was noted in 1833 by Maximilian, p. 72.